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BY

MARGARET A. HOLDING

Holding
NBO

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"WHY, JIMMY"

BY

MARGARET A. HOLDING

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DEDICATION

This book is affectionately dedicated to
My Mother,

HELEN CLARK HOLDING

"WHY, JIMMY"

CHAPTER ONE

James McGee Curruthers (known to his friends as "Jimmy"), private secretary to Jacob Fellersbee, president of the Fellersbee Manufacturing Company, lit his pipe, closed the door of the house (set back in the trees), thrust his hands into his pockets and strode away. It was a soft, starry, moonlit April night that proclaimed spring in every breeze that blew.

There are two things to be explained about Jimmy: first, his appearance, and, second, his disposition. He was tall—about six feet one or two and thin, too thin for his height. He was naturally white, with straight black hair and blue-gray eyes. He was not handsome, but his square jaw, honest eyes and well-proportioned features made him good looking in a homely way. He was possessed of a very even temperament (usually), a very level head, very acute conscience, a very keen sense of right and wrong and a truthful tongue. Now his dis-

position had never been given a fair test of what it really was like, for in twenty-five years he had never "run into" anything to unbalance his even temperament; never had use for anything but a level head; never had opportunity or desire to be anything but conscientious; never had anything but the right thing to do and never had been compelled to tell else but the truth. He smoked, he danced, and once in a great while, when the occasion seemed to demand it, he had sworn a little. Yet with all of these virtues he held aspirations of becoming a writer.

He had tried for two or three years, but instead of accepting his "works" with at least a smile, they had returned unchanged, with many thanks for the opportunity to read them; no thickened plots, no snarled mysteries, no thrilling romance nor humorous tales had manifested themselves either before his eyes to copy or in his mind to be thought out and written.

An hour after he had left the house he returned, climbed the steps, opened the door and switched on the light in the living-room. In the chair by the window, her feet curled under her, her chin resting on the interlocked fingers of both hands, her elbows on the arms of the chair, sat a girl. She was perhaps twenty-one or twenty-two, of medium height and medium weight. The dull black hair twisted high on her head was a contrast to her smooth white face, just slightly pink. A pair of large black

eyes were raised to him when she heard him enter.

James McGee Curruthers was surprised, but he did not jump; the Curruthers were not a jumping family. He just stared. It rather nettled him to see her there; he wanted solitude, he wanted to concentrate his mind, he wanted to be alone and undisturbed. Perhaps his mind was on these things and not on what she was saying when to her cheerful "Hello" he echoed "Hello."

He continued to stare but not to speak.

"I'm so glad you aren't going to ask me why I'm here. That would mar your delightful hospitality. I judge you are the owner"—he was not, but he let it pass—"and you know I could not tell you, so you are polite and refrain from asking questions." She smiled a forced smile. Jimmy thought her talking was forced. It seemed to him that she was doing it only to cover embarrassment.

"I'm sure you won't mind having me stay here for a few days. It must be lonesome for you."

"That's why I'm here. I don't care about company." Here was a place to lie, but Jimmy did not take advantage of it.

Her smile faded and then returned.

"Yes, I know it seems that way when company *first* comes, but afterward one is glad they came. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, yes, that's so. Come to think about it, I *am* lonesome to-night." Jimmy was *not* lying this time.

"Well then, that's fine. Isn't it grand to-night," she went on, "so springy and moonlight? Do sit down and act as though we had known each other more than five minutes."

He sat down opposite her and at last found his tongue.

"That's so; we *had* better be friendly since you are planning to stay awhile, and since neither of us owns the house—"

"Oh, are you a—"

"I don't know whether I am or not. But it's not mine; it's my brother's. My name is Curruthers. Jimmy we'll call it."

"And mine is Josephine Smith. We'll call it Jo." They laughed and then for half an hour said but little.

At eleven o'clock she smothered a yawn.

"Tired?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Sleepy?"

"Rather."

"Let's turn in."

"All right."

"There is only one bed made up. I'll show you to your room."

"Oh, no, you keep it. I'll stay here."

"Certainly not. You're my company, remember."

At the door of the bedroom he left her and went back to the living-room, where he sat down to think. He would like to have asked how she got in, but even

this he had refrained from doing. As though hearing his thought she appeared in the doorway.

"I came in the kitchen window, the south one. You had better lock it or we may have a house-party."

"Thanks for telling me. I'll see to it."

"And I won't steal anything."

"Of course not. I know from your looks you wouldn't do that."

She laughed a little.

"Good night."

"Good night. I breakfast at eight."

CHAPTER TWO

By noon the next day Jimmy was very interested, curious and glad she had come. He noticed that she stiffened at any unusual noise; that she cast furtive glances out the window every minute or two; that she constantly guarded against personal questions and, when not speaking, that she became preoccupied, with a far-away hopelessness about her. Something was surely wrong. Jimmy knew this, and for perhaps the first time in his life his curiosity was thoroughly aroused.

If she thought or felt queer about living in the house with a strange young man she did not show it. She appeared very much at ease. To tell the truth, Jimmy did not feel strange either. A few hours before he would have considered it quite shocking, but now it was different. For the first time he was doing the wrong thing, yet it was not his fault. With it all he liked her. He felt sorry for her—she was so sad at times—and with it all a plan was slowly forming in his mind.

"Why not," he mused, "make love to her, and no doubt she would tell me what is wrong and then proceed with the story and make a few dollars?"

His conscience lay perfectly still and did not even wriggle under this thought. He was acting his first real lie, and yet he did not realize the fact, or wait —was it a lie?

He shot a glance across the width of the room to where she sat in the afternoon sun, streaming through the window. Its rays, playing in the blackness of her hair, made her very picturesque. He smiled, then frowned. Was it a lie or was it not? He could not decide. His level head was becoming very weighty on one side, very light on the other. With one foot he kicked himself on the other shin, then threw himself down on the davenport and took up his book. It was a very interesting book (usually). He read one paragraph and then read it over and over and over. The realization that he did not know one word in that paragraph dawned on him slowly (the Curruthers were not quick). When he did realize it he kicked himself again and turned the page so viciously that he tore it. This made him mad (unbalanced his even temperament). He did not like to be destructive. Why should he tear that page? He slammed the book down upon the table and felt around for his pipe. Where was it? It had been right there. Who had taken it? Why couldn't he find it?

He did not care enough about it to get up and hunt. He would smoke a cigar and perhaps fall asleep. Why not go to sleep? She did not need to be entertained; she had come of her own accord.

Ah, that would be fine—such a nice afternoon for a nap. The cigar placed between his lips in the proper manner, he tried to light it. It would not draw. He jabbed a pin through it and tried again. This time his match went out; a second did likewise and also a third. The fourth one reached the cigar safely, but the thing still refused to draw. He jabbed again and put his hand out for another match. The box was empty.

"Oh, damn,"—he swung his feet to the floor—"I wanted my pipe in the first place, and somebody has taken it. I don't see what they'd want with my pipe. Then that damned cigar—for the love o' Mike, if—"

He found her looking at him in mild surprise and finished the sentence to himself.

"If a girl in the house makes everything go wrong like this I wish she would get out."

"Your pipe, did you say?" She rose.

"Yes."

"Why, it's right here on the table."

" 'Tis not." How impolite. Why, Jimmy.

She moved a magazine; under it lay the pipe. He remember now how very impolite he had been and grinned sheepishly.

"And there is a box of matches right there in your vest pocket." Was she making fun of him? "And the reason your cigar wouldn't draw right is that your pin was neither long enough nor big

enough around. I'll get you a hat pin. And the reason you were not comfortable while you were lying down was that you didn't have pillows enough." He tried to close his mouth. "And the reason you tore the page was because it was not cut at the top." She smiled. "So you see it was not I that made all the trouble after all."

"How—how did you know?"

"Just from the way you looked. It's all right; I know I'm imposing on good nature."

"I never thought what you think I did," he declared stoutly, "and thank you for telling me what was wrong."

"That's all right. Now wait." She was gone but a minute when she came back with two pillows from his bed in one hand and a hat pin and knife in the other.

"You have not said so, but I imagine you have been sick. There now"—beating up the pillows—"lie down." He obeyed her. With the knife she skillfully cut the leaves of the book and then guided the pin through the cigar and handed it to him, with a match that did not go out.

He looked up and smiled. "But you shouldn't wait on me."

"Oh, I'd much rather get you settled for the rest of the afternoon than to have you fussing and buzzing around." She went back to her chair and magazine.

"Oh," was all he could manage to utter.

"Go to sleep if you want to; I won't mind in the least."

"Thanks," was all he said again.

Go to sleep—why, who ever thought of doing such a thing as that? Of course not.

CHAPTER THREE

EVEN so comfortably fixed as he was, he did not read, but stared over the top of his book at the girl in the window. She finally laid aside her magazine and looked up.

"Don't move," he commanded. She stiffened. "How very beautiful you are with the sun on you that way." She relaxed. Jimmy wondered if this was the right way to begin his love-making. She might misconstrue what he had said and think that he meant she was not beautiful without the sun. He hurried to make himself clear. "Of course you are very lovely anyway, but with—"

"Oh, no." She smiled. It was a good thing she spoke, for he was getting nervous.

"Oh, yes, I think so. I ought to be a good judge, for I have seen lots."

She laughed. "Well."

"And more than thinking you beautiful, I like you immensely." Thoughtful Jimmy.

"I'm glad." Her smile faded and a wistful, pathetic look took its place. "I do you."

"I always shall," he went on. "I—"

"Maybe not," she interrupted, rising. "Let's

get something to eat. I'm simply starved." He rose and followed her to the kitchen, but he felt rather abused that she should cut him short in his first attempt. She ate little after all, and he knew why she had been so suddenly "simply starved."

He made one or two attempts again that evening, but made no headway and finally gave up for the time being. Either she had "caught on" to his scheme or was unconscious of the fact that he was trying to make love to her.

"I walk every night; won't you come with me tonight? I'd be glad to have you."

"Thank you; I will go."

"You have been sick, haven't you?" she asked, a few feet away from the house.

"Yes; why?"

"You look rather bad. What was the matter?"

"An operation."

"Oh." She caught her breath sharply and stumbled. He took her arm through his.

"I guess I can stand up now."

He ignored her remark.

"Were you very sick?"

"Pretty bad. I'm here to finish convalescing. The place is my brother's, ten years older than I am. He's a luckier old boy than I. Has made money hand over fist."

"And you?"

"Have not." He looked down into her upturned face and smiled. "I'm not a lucky one. I'm pri-

vate secretary to Jacob Fellersbee and have hopes—" He stopped embarrassed.

"Of what?" eagerly.

"Of being a writer."

"Oh, really. How lovely!" She was the first one to think so. He pressed her arm closer and took her hand in his.

"But I have never had anything taken yet."

"You will some day though."

"I can't seem to hit on the right ideas," earnestly.

"I'll help you if you want me to. I can often think of things."

"Sure I want you to. That's great. Why, you're a regular girl."

When two hours later they returned, she had learned much of his life, his plans, his hopes and his disposition. She had thought as much, but when she found beyond a shadow of doubt, from his confidences, that his ideals were as high as they were, she quaked inwardly.

He, two hours later, was congratulating himself on a start in the right direction, for, he reasoned, he really was not in love.

CHAPTER FOUR

She was unusually quiet the next day. When night came no progress in "love-making" had been made. It rained all afternoon, and that night at eight it was still pouring down. Jimmy spoke from the depths of a big chair.

"We can't go out to-night."

"No," from the depths of another big chair.

"Do you like to read?"

"I love to."

"And I love to be read to."

"Which means you would like to have me read to you?"

"Exactly; that is, if you don't mind."

"Not at all. What will it be?"

"There's one in here that looks interesting." He turned the pages. "It's about a girl who robbed a bank or somebody to get her—"

"Oh, how interesting it must be."

"Here it is," handing her the magazine. He leaned back and closed his eyes. She had a good, clear voice and read with feeling, making the story human and not a mere jumble of words.

She stopped reading in the middle of a sentence,

Jimmy thought to turn a page or catch her breath. She did catch her breath in a gasp, her head drooped and she rolled right out of the big chair onto the floor. Jimmy bounded up and dropped beside her. The pins had fallen from her hair and it hung like a dark cloud about her chalky face. He lifted her in his arms and bent over her anxiously.

"Jo, Jo, Josephine. Speak to me; say something, dear. Let me know you aren't dead." He leaned closer over her and kissed her and in doing it realized that he had wanted to do that very thing since the first night. Was it possible that he was really in love without knowing a thing about the girl or her very strange behavior? Was he? He was completely light-headed now, so he kissed her again and again.

"Oh, Jo, don't die." She was breathing, in fact seemed to be breathing about as usual. She finally opened her eyes and looked at him. She spoke in a whisper.

"Jimmy, I didn't faint. I was just dizzy and fell over, and I guess I choked or something. I'm sure I didn't really faint. I don't know why I fell. Please don't hold me quite so tight. I'll get up now."

He put her in the chair and gathered the hairpins from the floor. He was decidedly pale himself.

"I'll finish the story to-morrow night. I'll go to bed now."

A few minutes later she left and he tried to write, but the blond heroine was constantly pictured as having dull black hair and black eyes, which wouldn't do at all for a blond, so after tearing four sheets of paper he gave it up as a bad job.

CHAPTER FIVE

In the morning Jo seemed to be herself again; in fact, a little more herself than Jimmy would have liked. He didn't want her to be sick, but he was in hopes that she would be not quite so independent, capable of going on as usual. There also seemed to be more pronounced reserve about her, which he very much disliked. He noticed that she glanced from the window more often than she had been doing and grew more curious every minute. However, she seemed to be in the best of spirits—at least when he was anywhere near.

That night it was chilly enough for him to set ablaze the logs in the fireplace. It had stopped raining, but both seemed to feel that they would rather stay near the big fire. He drew the easy chairs close to it and incidentally rather close together. Jo sat down with her magazine and in five minutes was continuing her story. Jimmy kept his eye on her, but she showed no signs of fainting again. The story finished, she lay the magazine on the table and, looking sidewise at him, asked:

"How did you like it?"

"Oh, so-so. All right, though I don't see why she

would try to rob a bank. Might know she would be caught. Don't you think so?"

"Well, I don't know. She might not have been caught too, you know. She simply wasn't lucky."

"No, but how many ever are lucky under the same circumstances? Why would she ever think she could pull off a stunt like that?"

"That's just it; she didn't think. Probably if she had she would never have done it. But just hoped, you see. She realized she might be caught."

"Yes, I know all that," warming to the subject. "Any one would be a fool to attempt such a thing and then lie the way she did."

"She put off being caught the longer by doing it. It was only a natural attempt at self-perservation that would make her lie," also warming to the subject.

"Lying never does any good."

"I know you think that. No doubt you are right. But we will all lie for certain things, and all lie some time in our lives."

"But does it do any good?"

"That's a question. Sometimes it does and sometimes it doesn't."

"Does all that you are saying mean that you believe in lying?"

"No, of course I don't believe in it ordinarily, but I do say that sometimes we simply have to. It seems to be all right."

"You think it was all right for that girl to do the other things that she did do?"

"I do not. She should not have stolen; she should not have lied. But you see she had to do something; she had to have the money."

"But if she didn't have the money, why would she ever think of getting it that way? Why not let it be as it was and—"

"And let her innocent father be killed?" Her lip curled. "I suppose you would do that?" He flushed.

"Certainly not."

"Well?"

"Why didn't she ask for money instead of ruining her life?"

"Ask? There are plenty asking who could ask till they were dumb. She did it simply because she had to, and we will do anything if it is absolutely necessary." He shook his head.

"I don't agree with you."

"I can't help it if you don't. But it is true that we will."

"No."

"Yes."

"No. If the thing you do is not right, then the thing you do it for is not absolutely necessary."

"Well, but so near necessary that it might as well be."

"Well, as I said before, I can't agree with you."

"And as *I* said, I don't care whether you do or not, it is true." Her eyes snapped and her cheeks burned.

"Oh, of course, undoubtedly. Each one thinks he is right. I still contend that I am."

"So there is no use arguing longer about it. But," she added, going toward the door of her room, "I do think you are a very hard-hearted, relentless, unreasonable person. Perhaps sometime you will change your mind."

"I'm very sorry you have that opinion of me, and sorry that you must be so disappointed in me."

"Well, I am, though I might have expected as much from one with as angelic a disposition as you have." She stood still a minute and then, brushing a tear from her cheek, she burst out, "Oh, people like you make me tired," and rushed into her room.

Jimmy sighed.

"She's the oddest, nicest mixture." He threw out his hands. "And I was planning on proposing tonight."

CHAPTER SIX

JIMMY overslept the next morning, and when at nine he went into the kitchen, he found her there, her head upon her arms on the table. He wondered if she was still angry. He had had some thought that she might have left and was relieved to find that she had not. He did not want her to go. He would miss her terribly. What if she did not accept him? What if she were already married? When Jimmy thought of such a possibility he mentally gritted his teeth and said that it simply could not be; she *must* marry him; there could be no other way. He sighed —sighed so loudly that Jo raised her head and eyed him silently for a minute.

"She *is* mad," he thought. Then she smiled. "She isn't mad," he exulted.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"I—I thought you might be mad."

"So might you," she returned.

"But I'm not."

"Nor I. Every one has a right to his opinion."

"I'm glad you are not."

"Why?" looking the other way.

"Because I like you."

"Oh."

A warmth crept around Jimmy's heart. That "oh" struck him *just right.*

That night it rained again and Jimmy built a fire and drew the chairs up. He stood by the table until she had taken one of them, then, turning out all but one small light, he took his place in the other. He leaned back, thrust his feet far out in front of him and watched her from beneath half-closed eyes. She was very quiet, and he remained silent also. She stared into the fire except occasionally when she glanced at him.

"What would you say if I should ask you to marry me?" The question was very straightforward and direct. Jimmy was pleased with himself; how calm he was, just as usual.

"Yes or no most likely," she answered, without looking up.

He smiled. "I'm going to."

"Are you?"

"Do you mind?"

"Not in the least. Really, Jimmy, your hero must not ask that; it doesn't sound just right."

Jimmy looked blank. "What do you mean by 'my hero'?"

"Why, I know you are practicing, and I thought I would warn you that a good hero would just dash ahead and do it."

He leaned forward. So she had guessed. He rallied his forces and went at it again.

"But, Jo, I'm not practicing."

"Oh," a little startled. "I thought—I thought you were making love to—to practice."

"But what would you say if I did propose?"

"I don't know."

"Why don't you?"

"Because you haven't done it."

"I'm doing it now. I do want you to marry me. I'm mad about you," in true lover fashion. "I love you, Jo; I love you and you must say yes. Do you care at all?"

She tipped her head back as far as possible, closed her eyes tight and pressed her hand over her mouth. She remained thus for a second, then, tipping her heard forward again, she answered:

"Yes." Jimmy was on his feet and over to her.

"And you will marry me?"

"No."

It was as though some one had thrown cold water on his head. He dropped to her side and took her hand in his.

"Why not?"

"For a great many reasons."

"Why?" he repeated.

"I—I just can't," she evaded.

"You don't care enough?" She did not answer. "Is that it?"

"No."

"You are already married?"

"Mercy, no."

"You will be disowned or killed or something like that?"

"No"—and under her breath—"not for that."

"Then why? Please, dearest, tell me."

She sat perfectly still for a number of minutes. "Well, I suppose I might as well," she sighed. "It will make you take back all you have just said to me, but you probably will have to know some time."

"May I stay here while you tell me?" he asked. He was on the floor at her feet, his head resting against her knee, her hand still in his.

"I don't mind; nothing matters now. You will want to get out of the house when you know."

"Nothing will make me take back what I have said. Nothing can matter."

"Perhaps you will want to run as far from me as possible when you know what I have done."

"Nothing would make me feel that way," he repeated.

"It will make a fine story if you can get it written right." Jimmy flushed. "And I will be glad to help you. You have been very kind to let me stay here, and I know you have thought it strange for me to do it and not give a word of explanation. You see I have just been playing for time. I've expected them before now. It's strange they have not come. Have you heard enough?"

"No."

"Then I'll begin at the beginning."

CHAPTER SEVEN

"My name is not Smith; it's Carter, Josephine Carter. I have no family except my twin sister Harriet. She has been in the hospital for a full year. In the city I worked in the office of a wholesale grocery company. I did stenography and general office work in the treasurer's office. I had worked there quite a while and earned fourteen dollars a week—just enough to pay for Harriet's hospital board, my own room rent, food and clothes. I couldn't pay the doctors a cent. Three months ago Harriet grew worse, and they said she would die but for another operation. She had had two before that, of course, were not paid for. Well, I simply could not have her die without making every effort to save her, and they would not operate again without some money. At the same time we received word that our only aunt, who lived in England, had died and left us each a thousand dollars. I was so pleased, but we would not get the money for two or three weeks at the earliest. Harriet had to have the operation immediately or not at all, so in a way the money could not help us out. Seemingly there was nothing to do but see my only sister die for

lack of a few dollars at the right time. Two days later I was alone in the office staying late to do some work, and a man came in with two thousand dollars in bills. He was an ignorant, little-town store-keeper who owed this amount, and instead of sending it by check he came in and paid it that way." She let her disengaged hand fall lightly on his head and rest there as she continued.

"I sat there and thought and thought for two hours. I *thought* about taking that money, not saying anything about it, and then replacing it when we received ours. Finally I took it and left. I did not want to do it. I hated to do it, but I had to. I paid the bills, Harriet had her operation, never knowing, and everything was all right for about two weeks. Our money came, and I endorsed my check and took Harriet's to the hospital and she endorsed hers, happily thinking that it had come at the right time, and I happy in the thought that I could pay back the money I had taken without any one knowing the difference. That was Sunday. I took it to my room, planning to cash it Monday and give it back as it had come. When I came back from dinner and opened my bag to see that precious slip of paper, it was gone, gone, never to be seen again. The bottom dropped out of everything then. I was crazy. I was a thief, a common thief. I don't know now how I lived through that day. I have no idea how I lost it or where.

"I went down Monday late in the forenoon, thinking I would tell Mr. Gorly about it and see if he would let me pay it back as I could. I thought he was kind-hearted enough to be willing to do it. There is a window in his office that opens into the corridor. When I went by I heard voices, so I stopped and listened. The president, the secretary, the store-keeper and Mr. Gorly were all in there. The man had received another bill and had come in to see about it. Of course I was given away. I stood rooted to the spot. They were talking about me; they knew I had taken it, and I knew they would have no sympathy for me. I listened until they called the police and told where I lived, and then I ran. I packed a little bag and told the landlady I was going on a vacation. I went to the hospital, but Harriet was asleep. I left word not to worry, that I had simply gone away for a little while. From there I took a train, and for two months I have dodged the police. I couldn't tell all the places I have been before I came here. They will probably find me, and I might as well give up. Poor Harriet—it will probably kill her if I never come back. She may even be dead now, for I have not dared to write or try to hear from her. I wish every one knew how I feel. How terrible to have to do a thing like that. My father was a minister, and all my family as far from being thieves as that lamp on the table. I did not do it to be doing wrong. I meant to pay it back. I have tried not

to give way, but now I have about lost control of myself. I feel all the time as though I were choking. As if—" she stopped. "Now you know. Think what you want. I can easily imagine what that is. Write the story if you can. I'll kill myself before it is published. Nothing matters now, nothing matters." She drew her hand away and rose, picked up her hat, coat and gloves from a chair and started for the door. She sighed wearily. She had seemingly lost all her spirit, ambition, hope.

Jimmy sprang in front of her, but she went around him toward the door again. He made a rush and reached it first, holding it shut by standing against it.

"I want to go now," she said.

"Oh, no, you are not."

"Please, Mr. Curruthers. I know what you think of me, but I don't think you will try to help the police capture me by keeping me here, so please let me out."

"I won't let you go. I—"

"Very well, I'll go the back way." She turned and started for the kitchen. He followed, caught her by the shoulders and turned her around.

"Josephine."

"Please, Mr. Cur—Jimmy, you're hurting my arms, ouch."

He loosened his hold slightly. "Now listen to me. You are not going out of this house to-night or to-morrow till you go to town to marry me. I

don't care what you are. I want you. I love you above everything, and you are never going to leave me for very long. I said nothing would matter; I meant it. As for the story, I certainly can write it and I know the end."

"What is it?"

"Why, the girl will accept the man in the house and they will be married and he, with her help, will write the story and it will be accepted, and they will pay back the money and take care of the sister and live happily ever after. And though he hasn't any money now, he will have after a while. Now isn't that the way it is going to end?"

"I—I suppose so if the author wants it to." He could feel the beating of her heart as he crushed her in his arms. His head was level when he kissed her closed eyes, her cheeks (now flushed a deep pink) and then her mouth, but when suddenly two arms were thrown around his neck, his head drawn down and a pair of lips pressed against his of their owner's own accord he was absolutely silly.

"But if they should find me?" she whispered, drawing away.

"I would hide you and lie, sweetheart."

"Proving that—" saucily.

"In case of absolute necessity one will do anything," he admitted.

"But it isn't absolutely necessary," she teased.

"Why, if I didn't hide you they would get you"—drawing her back into the hollow of his arm—"and

if they did get you—oh, well, it *is* necessary that I keep you, and, besides, what is the use in arguing such a fine point as that? Tell me, Jo darling, what's the use?"

"But why have you changed so?" she questioned a few minutes later when she was in the chair again with Jimmy at her feet. "Why you would want me, Jimmy dear, is more than I can understand."

"Perhaps you don't understand, but I do and that *is* all that matters. A few lies don't hurt. What is the use of a level head all the time? And if we all had even temperaments there would be nothing to live for. I thought I had a very conscientious soul, but, pshaw—" Josephine Carter smiled and so did Jimmy.

CHAPTER EIGHT

At nine the next morning they started for town and at eleven they returned. Both were unchanged and yet they were different—what was it? Married, of course.

"Josephine Carter Curruthers goes rather funny together, doesn't it, Jimmy?"

"Funny—no. I think it's fine—much better than plain Josephine Carter." And then he kissed her right there on the porch before he unlocked the door.

"Silly" was all she said, but she seemed to approve of such nonsense.

At three o'clock that afternoon Jimmy again lay on the davenport. This time his pipe had been found beforehand and his book (the same one) had had all its leaves cut, and all around Jimmy was absolutely content. However, he did not read a great deal; most of the time was spent in watching the girl in the window: *his* girl—his *wife*. He was wondering if she really did care much about him. As he thought about it he realized that she never had said she loved him—perhaps she didn't. She had seemed rather distant, more so than before they had seriously talked of any such thing as love or

marriage. Perhaps that was the reason. Perhaps —he looked away from her and attempted to read the book. Why was it that the blamed thing was so stale? Perhaps she—the book forgotten again.

"Jimmy." It was a startled, choked whisper. Her hand flew to her heart, she jumped from the chair and threw herself down by the davenport. Her face was drawn and her hands clasped and unclasped. Jimmy sat up, the book dropping to the floor. She took his hands in hers and dropped her face on them. He put his arm around her.

"What's the matter, dear? Jo, tell me?"

"Jimmy, oh, Jimmy, I—they—he—there's a man walking around the bend of the lake, he—I saw him —he—oh, Jimmy, I know, I know he is looking for me; I know it. Oh, my God, Jimmy, what shall we do?" She was trembling violently all over, but her voice was low and her eyes burningly dry. He drew her onto her feet beside him.

"He can't find me, he can't—I won't let him. Don't let him—don't. You won't, will you, Jimmy? Say you won't." She clutched his arms as she spoke.

"Get you? No, of course not. No one is ever going to get you. But we must not waste time, dearest. I must hide you and do it quick; perhaps there is no danger, but we will make sure. There, honey, don't shake so," drawing her closer. "Remember no one is going to find you, not as long as I'm around, never"—kissing her—"never, never."

"Where are you taking me?" as he led her away.

"I'm going to put you in this mammoth clothes hamper that my thoughtful sister-in-law left, and then put the hamper back of the attic stairs; there's a little space there that no one would ever think of looking into. I doubt if he searches at all, but we'll do it to make sure, so here goes."

She stepped in and sat down Turk-fashion. It was plenty large enough, and he adjusted the lid and pushed the basket behind the stairs.

"Don't worry."

"No," came the voice from within—a small, scared voice—and because Jimmy was human and young and in love and just married four hours he pulled the hamper out, took off the lid, stooped down and kissed the owner of the voice.

Five minutes later he was standing on the steps gazing, as it were, at all nature in general apparently; in reality waiting for the figure coming toward him.

"Afternoon."

"Good afternoon," Jimmy replied.

"Fine day."

"Fine," agreed Jimmy.

"You have come earlier than most."

"I'm convalescing here. It's my brother's place."

"I see." He opened his coat enough for Jimmy to see the star on his vest and pushed his hands into his pockets. "Been here long?" he went on.

"About a month."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

The man tapped his star, and Jimmy raised his eyebrows.

"That's why I asked you."

"Oh, I see. Something happening around here?"

"Well, yes and no. Small theft a few miles from here. We think the party passed this way; in fact, tracked 'er to here. It isn't a case I'm much taken with. Pretty slick though. It's a girl, you see, and I don't like that kind of a case."

"So." Jimmy smoked on nonchalantly.

"You—er—haven't seen any one pass by?"

"No."

"Or you don't happen to know anything about it?"

"Not a thing."

"Sure of that?"

"Sure."

"I don't like to ask, but I'll have to look around a little since you are the only one who has a house open. May I look your place over?"

"Certainly." Jimmy led the way and the man followed with a gruff "Hum." Jimmy silently watched him.

"I'd rather go through the rooms alone."

"Very well."

When he came back a few minutes later, Jimmy offered him a cigar and lit one for himself.

"Thanks. I thought you looked truthful, but the law is the law, you know."

"Certainly, I understand."

"And now your name."

"Curruthers—James McG."

"Positive you haven't seen any one go by?"

"No, sir, I haven't seen any one go by." Jimmy chuckled to think that what he had just said was the absolute truth, for she had not gone by, she had come in.

"Very well; she's dodged us again. Poor kid, no telling why— Thank you, sir. Hope you recover sufficiently. Good-by."

"Good-by."

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CHAPTER NINE

He waited until the man was well out of sight before he went back to the hamper under the stairs. He found her there, but not as he had left her. The hamper was tipped over and with her feet still in it, but the rest of her lay prone upon the floor face downward.

"She has killed herself," he thought wildly, but when he drew nearer he heard a very peculiar sound and upon investigation found it to be a muffled, hysterical laugh. Jimmy dropped to the floor and took her in his arms. There she lay, her head upon his shoulder, and in an almost incoherent gasp told what had happened.

"After you left I climbed out and took some clothes and climbed back in and put them on my head, and that man—he—he discovered this place; I mean he opened the door and—and I simply stopped breathing. He poked his finger through the top of the lid, but he said 'Clothes' and walked off. I'm just beginning to breathe comfortably again." Then more soberly, "Thank you for lying for me. I—why do you look so sad? Have I done something?"

"Bless your heart, *no*. And imagine thanking me for doing all I could to save my own wife—imagine it. As for looking sad, I'm still worrying for fear—"

"Of what?"

"For fear that perhaps after all you don't care—"

"Care what?" excitedly.

"Care much about me."

"*Why*, Jimmy?"

"Well, you have never said you do."

"Why, Jimmy, I have too."

"You have not."

"Oh, let's not have an argument on our wedding day."

"We won't if you'll say it."

"I wouldn't have married you if I hadn't cared," truthfully.

"Oh, I don't know," just to tease.

"*Why*, Jimmy," shocked. "If you talk that way I won't—"

"Won't what?"

"You know."

"You haven't told me. You won't what?"

"I won't lo—"

"There—you started in the right direction. Finish it up."

"I won't love you any more."

"Well, that's more like it. But you never have said you did before."

"*Why, Jimmy,*"—sitting erect—"I have *too,*" blinking her eyes saucily. "I do love you and—" But the sentence was never finished. It was smothered on his shoulder as he hugged her in ecstasy.

"Jimmy"—faintly—"don't strangle me."

"Turn around here and kiss me then." She turned. "There"—to the opposite wall—"you see she does just as *I* want her to already."

"*Why,* Jimmy, I *do not.* I wanted to kiss you all of myself."

"Oh, I see," with a laugh. "We will let it stand that way, but just the same I—" Whereupon he received a stinging slap squarely on his left cheek.

"For penance I'll make you sit down and start taking dictation from me immediately. That story of ours is to be started to-night."

CHAPTER TEN

It was started that night. Josephine's nimble fingers flew, and Jimmy's mind was in excellent working order. For three days and evenings they worked like mad, scarcely taking time to eat. Then for two weeks while they waited for "it" or the check to be returned they honeymooned.

Two weeks later Jimmy opened the envelope and pulled out a crisp check for three thousand dollars, which marks the end of this particular story. That story was commented upon as being so very "life like." Strange, wasn't it?

THE END

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